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ABSTRACT

Brief case studies of three projects are presented to illustrate the steps which open "Wonderful Programs" to evaluation research. The evaluator is provided with the perspective needed to believe the evaluation is worth doing. The project staff is then redirected to the need for a new type of evidence. An ongoing review of the commitment to evaluation research at all organizational levels is initiated. There are two models for evaluation of existing successful programs. The criteria for the "charity" model of program evaluation are the sincerity of the program funders and the willingness of program staff. The strength and leverage of the program constituency are the outcome criteria of the "pork barrel" model. A climate of cooperation and teamwork between the project staff and the evaluator are essential to successful evaluation. The evaluator must introduce the concept of the research model of evaluation as a process which does not necessarily set aside the previous findings, but is a process required to address the relationship of the efforts-to-outcomes question implied in the funders' requests for evaluation. (DWH)

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Evaluating Programs
The Whole World Already Calls Wonderful

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Evaluating Programs the Whole World Already Calls Wonderful

As the title suggests, there is a logical absurdity in evaluating an event that has already been value labeled. But in a world which tends to skip in and out of logical practices, the need for this type of evaluation is not uncommon. Three projects will be described in this paper. They all required development and application of a technique to facilitate successful scientific evaluations of projects that had already received public and professional acclaim.

BACKGROUND

Education, like other social endeavors, tends to promote and accept a project on the basis of the proposed merit, the charm of a good idea or sympathy for a worthwhile effort. To gain broad-based support for unusual projects, especially those which require extra resources, public relations or political campaign techniques are often used. In these processes the information promoted may run ahead of the experiential data. However, if the promotion is successful and the project catches on, someone (usually a funding source) can be expected to ask for data which show that the project does what it claims. For example, if the program purports to be educational, what are the educational effects?

If no evidence has been prepared by the internal staff due to lack of time, training, or inclination, it is not unusual for the project director to call for assistance from an outside evaluator. This can create an awkward situation for both the evaluator and the project staff

under the best of conditions, but the tensions are exacerbated when the project has been celebrated for its success. The staff know the project works and feel abused that their public recognition isn't proof enough; the evaluator is seen as invasive and redundant. This is the climate which must be changed if the evaluation is to be done.

The studies reported in this paper vary in content: planetarium science experiences, human ecology, and aesthetic literacy. There is a commonality, however, in that all three focus on what seem on initial examination to be intangibles. The concepts promoted are valued affectively but difficult to get a handle on empirically.

METHOD

The first problem to be solved before the evaluation can begin concerns convincing all actors of the legitimacy of the effort--especially the evaluators. It comes down to the question of "What are we doing here?" Michael Patton (1981) has an explanation that provides the first step in resolving the apparent contradiction in evaluating Wonderful Programs and then easing the tension between project staff and evaluator. He describes two models of evaluation which preceded the research-based model. They have titles commendable more for their descriptive clarity than their diplomacy, the "charity" model and the "pork barrel" model.

Under the "charity" model the criteria for evaluation of programs are the sincerity of funders and the willingness of program staff who give it their best try. The "pork barrel" model takes as its outcome criteria the strength and leverage of the program constituency.

The evaluator's sense of redundancy is removed when she is able to classify the previous evaluation of the project as either or both of these models--models not necessarily to be refuted but to be supplemented. (The projects which are included in this discussion fit into the classification as one pork barrel, one charity and one mixed-model, i.e., both pork barrel and charity.) While it is not necessary or even sensible to describe the pork barrel or charity models to the project staff, the evaluator can convey the idea that her task is not to change any evaluation conclusions that already exist but to add another dimension--the scientific research based model of evaluation. The critical task for the outside evaluator is to introduce the concept of the research model of evaluation as a process which does not necessarily set aside the other models' findings but which is a process required to address the relationship of efforts to outcomes question implied in the funders' requests for evaluation.

At this point the second step of the technique is possible. The evaluator directs the project staff's attention naturally toward a redefinition of the audience for the evaluation report. The project staff becomes partners with the evaluator for the purpose of convincing the new audience of the project's effectiveness in an irrefutable scientific manner.

Although the evaluation must gain the project staff's cooperation by focusing them on the need for scientific results, it seems to be important for the utilization-focused evaluator not to lose sight of the charity and pork barrel adherents in the organization. These forces can derail the research study.

The third step of the technique for evaluating Wonderful Programs is to stimulate the organization's leadership to communicate their support for this evaluation to all components of the project. In each of the projects to be described, the program organization was complex, and the success of the research based evaluation in terms of utilization of information was strongly associated with the tightness of the authority and communication links. Where organizational lines are informal or indirect, it will be necessary to reinforce the need for the evaluation research frequently. Unlike the typical evaluation situation in which the staff feels threatened, in Wonderful Program evaluation the staff are more likely to feel indifferent to evaluation research because in their eyes the project has been proven, unless they are convinced that the entire chain of command is behind this new evaluation. In Project II to be described, the prominence of the governing board as a "pork barrel" constituency tended to deflect the director's perception of the importance of the empirical data for the funding source. This director was swayed back and forth by the wishes of each individual board member including the one promoting the evaluation research. In Project I, the director had a clear line of authority and, once convinced that the new evaluation needed to be done, cooperatively shaped the acceptance of a tight, research-based evaluation study.

In summary, the steps for evaluating Wonderful Programs flow directly from a commitment to a utilization-focused research evaluation model (Patton, 1981) and to developing a consensus on the specific needs

of the specific decision-maker i.e., the new audience (Rothman, 1980). In the projects to be described the project staffs were educated around a redefinition of the audience for the evaluation (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1981). When accompanied by clear communication of organizational support, this reeducation created the necessary climate of cooperation and teamwork between the project staff and the evaluator.

THE PROJECTS

Project I involved a planetarium science project initially supported by a Title IV-C grant. This project had been used as a rallying point to rebuild community interest in a very large elementary school after court-ordered desegregation through busing. The school and district administrators had given this project major support, and student and parental enthusiasm had proclaimed it to be a definite success. Project staff believed this also.

IV-C funds were about to expire and the district felt that they had a program which should be Nationally Validated and receive Dissemination funding. Yet they had no hard data to show that the planetarium approach to science was educationally useful.

A major stumbing block to gathering this data was that "everyone knew it worked" and that a new evaluation was considered redundant. The outside evaluator suggested that enthusiasm for the task might be increased if the task was redefined as showing skeptical outsiders (the Joint Dissemination Review Panel) how well it worked and why.

Only two short meetings were required to educate the project staff about the rigorous nature of the evidence that was needed. They put aside any feelings of resistance to the evaluator and adapted an attitude reflecting their resolution that they had convinced their administration and their community and now they were accepting the challenge to convince the JDRP.

The district accepted the evaluation plan and publicly threw its weight behind a design which required the cooperation of three neighboring school districts and forty teachers--plus replication with another forty teachers for the second year of data gathering. The resulting pre-post comparison group data collection design eliminated important alternative explanations to the growth in earth/space science knowledge in third and fifth graders, allowing program impact to remain the most plausible explanation. The Joint Dissemination Review Panel gave this program a 7-0 vote of approval and a $50,000 dissemination grant for 1984.

This project, previously evaluated by the "pork barrel" model because of its constituency of teachers, parents, administrators, scientific experts and students, now had also received outstanding recognition under a scientific evaluation model. The major step had been to convince the staff that the outside evaluation would complement rather than replace their community vote of approval and to redirect their attention to gathering data for a new audience.

Project II. The purpose of the Delaware Institute for the Arts in Education was "to help the schools provide young people with greater opportunities to explore the arts and to discover the aesthetic experiences our world provides." The program was a directly-modeled importation of the program which has been conducted at New York's Lincoln Center for the past three years. In Delaware the aesthetic literacy goal was to be accomplished through a three-step program of training teachers, planning the school arts program and then implementation of this plan. Aesthetic literacy, as formulated by the parent program, evolves from improvements in arts-related perception, analysis and vocabulary skills.

The program was comissioned on the basis of Lincoln Center's artistic reputation although neither the Lincoln Center nor its satellites in other cities had much evidence of the educational impact of the project. It was brought to Delaware by a committee of prestigous educators and artists who arranged the original funding.

The organizational set-up of this project was relevant to the evaluation challenge because it influenced the cohesiveness of project support for the evaluation. The project was financially managed through a university music department, although the part-time director was housed in the office of a local school district. However, this director looked to the parent program in New York for his guidance. The project was asuumed to be worthy on the basis of its source (Lincoln Center) and constituency (the governing board). For the first six months of

the project development the school districts in which the program was to be installed were involved only at the top levels--superintendent and/or board members. The focus was on getting the project funded and operational rather than its expected results. The project was advertised to potential participants as effective based on the elements of a "pork barrel" model of evaluation (although they certainly did not see it that way).

One university-related member of the board convinced the university-based financial manager that a more scientific evaluation was possible. The project director was then informed that this evaluation research was to be done. His interest was minimal because he was interested in the artistic rather than the educational merit of this workshop--this was also the point of view of most of the governing board. In order to get the evaluation off the ground, it was necessary for the evaluator to educate the project director that a very real audience for the effectiveness of the project was the school districts who could pay for the program. The evaluator had to meet with the school district people at a Director of Instruction level; to list their concerns with how the program should prove itself educationally, place the concerns in the context of the decision that the districts had to make between using this project or an artists-in-residence approach. Then the project director had to be sold on the need to provide evidence of educational effectiveness if he wanted the project to receive school district support. At that point, the project director accepted the evaluation as legitimate.

The subjects in the workshop phase of the program were 48 classroom and specialty teachers who attended a two-week institute which had as objectives:

- Increased perception of the elements of the arts: music, visual arts, theatre and dance;
- Improvement in vocabulary related to the arts;
- Increased skills in analysis, i.e., ability to identify key principles and form generalizations;
- Improved transmission of workshop learning to students in the participating schools.

Through background assessments, daily questionnaires, paper and pencil measures and the teachers' preparation of implementation plans, systematic objective evidence was collected which gave daily formative feedback to the program. The data also showed that three subsets of teachers had substantive, beyond chance, growth in vocabulary. Two out of three subgroups showed substantive and statistically significant growth in attainment and application of arts concepts. Thirty days after the end of the program, 27 of the participants submitted a plan for transferring what they had learned to the classroom; 23 of these were judged acceptable according to pedagogical and arts standards.

An interesting postscript was added to this project when a board member, previously satisfied with the port barrel approach, used the research evaluation report as the basis of an argument for continued funding in an appeal to the State Finance Committee. This funding will still be partly based on the charity model of credible people

trying hard because the critical link between teachers' attainment of aesthetic literacy and student attainment of the same is yet to be demonstrated. But the most difficult part of the evaluation has been accomplished--the staff understand that a scientific evaluation of the educational aspects does not inhibit their own evaluation of the artistic merits of the music, theatre and dance productions.

Project III. This project supports the usefulness of the three-step technique developed for Wonderful Program evaluaton in a divergent rather than a convergent sense because it shows that when one or more steps is dysfunctional, the evaluation research is delayed.

Project III also received its first-year funding from Title IV-C. The March of Dimes then supported it for two years using a charity model of evaluation. The objective of the program is to create a secondary level course which would help to improve the human condition--specifically to diminish physical and psychological damage and birth defects through student understanding of human development and chemical, social and psychological pollutants. The project involves student volunteer work in human service agencies and much contact with health organizations in the community. In 1983 it was selected as one of the five best science programs in the country by the National Science Teachers Association. This award was not based on evidence of educational effect. The judges were impressed by the humanitarian, holistic nature of the program, and by its intent to meet a very real need.

The outside evaluation was called for by the district's Federal Projects Office to develop an evaluation design and necessary documentation of outcomes to convince the March of Dimes to continue supporting the program.

The teaching staff was not easily convinced that any changes needed to be made to demonstrate the effectiveness of their program. They already had cognitive measures, they had a videotape describing the program and they had student community service records. They also had no idea of the validity of their indicators or the means of tying program efforts to student change. With the urging of the district's Federal Projects Office they tolerated the development of a paper and pencil cognitive test based on their curriculum materials and an affective assessment of work attitudes. The results of the administration of this test in a quasi-experimental design showed that the program students were no different from the controls in the knowledge gain although there was both statistical and substantive growth in work attitudes associated with the community service experience.

These fundings came as a shock to the project teachers. Their first reaction was to denigrate the data until they were reminded that they had approved the tests and even used the post-test scores in the semester's marks.

With the teachers' assistance the paper and pencil test has been strengthened, new control groups selected and background indicators categorized to control to some degree the effect of the students' testing

differentials. (That is, what other health, biology, home economics courses have they taken which may have given them information related to project goals?) A separate naturalistic strategy is collecting evidence in the volunteer work experience.

The major problem that has surfaced, however, is that the teachers believe that they have worked hard and tried their best at a worthy project. Every time they are invited to tell their story of their program in St. Louis or in Boston or in Washington, their interest in the scientific documentation of effect goes down. They are satisfied with the other models of evaluation--with good reason it seems, as they were refunded even in the face of the "no differences" in the first year evaluation results. The principal is convinced by program claims and so is the community. All parts of the administration are not pushing for evaluation research so cooperation is very passive.

For this Wonderful Program, a thorough scientific evaluation may not be possible because (a) all project staff do not have a stake in this evaluation model because the program may continue without future outside financial support and (b) the project staff find it hard to believe that any audience will not be convinced by the project description because so many awards have come to them on the basis of that "evidence."

CONCLUSION

Brief case studies have been presented as illustration of the three steps which open Wonderful Programs to evaluation research. The first step provides the evaluator with the perspective needed to believe that the evaluation is worth doing. The second step redirects the project staff to the need for a new kind of evidence. The third step initiates an ongoing review of the commitment to the evaluation research at all organizational levels.

In each case the project director called for evaluation research at the urging of someone who feared that popularity was insufficient reason to support an expensive educational program. The outside evaluator was placed in the delicate position of empirically demonstrating what the public has already been convinced of--that the program worked. The evaluation effort was stonewalled until the director's attitude was changed from "we don't need to collect evidence, we know it works" to "let's show them it works!"

As more and more administrators pick up on the power inherent in data based documentation of educational efforts, the problems presented in this paper will be replicated. The success of this Wonderful Program type of evaluation strongly depends upon establishing the evaluation's perceived legitimation, focusing on the evaluation audience(s) and gaining evaluation commitment consensus.

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